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The Church of Christ---The Church of the Future.

A

SERMON

DELIVERED AT THE INSTALLATION OF

REV. STILLMAN CLARKE,

AS PASTOR OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY IN WILTON, N. H.

JUNE 11, 1857,

BY MARTIN W. WILLIS,

OF NASHUA.

"Ringing changes all our bells hath marred;
"Jangled they have and jarred
"So long, they're out of tune and out of frame
"They seem not now the same.
"Put them in frame anew, and once begin
"To tune them so, that they may chime all in!"—[HERBERT.

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SERMON.

I. CORINTHIANS, II. 12, 10, 5.

NOW WE HAVE RECEIVED, NOT THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD, BUT THE SPIRIT WHICH IS OF GOD. FOR THE SPIRIT SEARCHETH ALL THINGS, YEA, THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD, WHICH THINGS ALSO WE SPEAK, THAT YOUR FAITH SHOULD NOT STAND IN THE WISDOM OF MEN, BUT IN THE POWER OF GOD.

Religion is the necessity of human nature. More ancient than recorded history are the traces, traditions, and monuments of religion. The facts of a religious consciousness have been rudely expressed and symbolized in the worship of all nations. For the sake of religion, men have sundered the dearest ties of country and home, and braved the perils of persecution and death. Nothing human nature can suffer or do, in its behalf, has been held too priceless to sacrifice on her altars. By the grace of nature, man is religious; by culture, he becomes moral; by the grace

of God—by the reception of truth, by faith in Christ, by personal effort, he becomes Christian. A heathen may be moral, for such have been. A heathen may be religious, as pagan temples and rites, and all history, prove. But a Christian has a higher order of spiritual life, by virtue of communion with Christ, than the religious sentiment, unaided by special revelation, can give, or mere morality bestow. Christianity legitimates, unfolds and purifies the religious nature, while it furnishes an everlasting basis of moral action in the attributes of God and the moral consciousness of man. Natural religion needed this corroboration. Superstition, fanaticism, and fear, were the fruits of natural religion. It needed a guide, and in the fulness of time, the Redeemer came, that our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, and in the deep things of the spirit. The high creed of absolute religion, is love to man, and love to God. Christianity appropriates, unfolds, and illustrates this grand truth as a sentiment, rather than as a doctrine. But the logical understanding, after the first fervor of faith had passed, attempted to state to itself the facts of a Christian consciousness; hence we have theology. Theology is not religion, but an attempt to explain religion. It is the account that the intellect gives to itself of its religious beliefs. Theology has sought to theorize and explain God's relation to man, while the Gospel,

everywhere, explains man's relation to God. Christ scarcely ever went beyond the declaration that God is our Father, and other facts of religion in which all agree. Indeed, I fear that, were he on the earth, in visible presence, he would hardly pass an examination in dogmatic theology, in some of our "schools of the prophets," though he might astonish our modern doctors of divinity as much as he did those in the temple at Jerusalem.

I respect theology, but I dare not call it religion. I dare not say that any man, or body of men, or church, has been able to compress within the boundaries of their intellectual formulas, or define by logical analysis, that deep, spiritual mystery, the religious life—Christ formed in us the hope of glory. I cannot believe that the celestial arcana of the spiritual world —yea, the deep things of God—may be known, except by the spirit of God, as Paul declares in our text: which things we speak, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

From this high stand point of faith in the deep things of God—in this large freedom from the trammels of creeds, but loyal to the boundless spirit and inspiration of religion; recognizing the presence of the glorious Redeemer; touched by the beauty of his Divine Life; thrilled with gratitude at the culmination of that life in the resurrection; and conscious of human nature and need—we would speak to-day;—feel-

ing the while something of the deep interpretation of the Cross of Christ, and listening, with a hushed heart, to the dying echoes of those last words of the Son of God,—"It is finished — It is finished,"— which lingered on the night air of Palestine, as his pure heart ceased to beat, and the highest expression of spiritual beauty passed away from earth!

The spirit of the age is trying the opinions of men as by fire. The old and the new — old errors and new follies—are clashing in a fearful strife. Conservatism trembles, and retreats into the dim arches and twilight of the cell and cloister; entrenches itself in a historic reminiscence; exhumes old traditions; burns its tapers on Protestant altars; imitates in the church, the sacerdotal formalities and puerilities of the medieval age, hoping, by retreat into the past, to secure its authority in the present; trusting to find God in the rear, who, like the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, leads on true hearts to the promised land. In church and state, it falls back on what authority it can find; while reform, with bold and reliant aspect, moves with hasty step to demolish whatever old falsity it opposes, and sometimes would crumble the altars of faith by the fire of its unhallowed enthusiasm.

——"His hand its skill to try,
Amid the chords bewildered laid,
And, back recoiled, he knew not why,
E'en at the sound himself had made."

But high over all—all undisturbed by the turmoil and the tempest below—shine the serene and everlasting lights of truth. It is well to watch the signs of the times — to stand apart on the high table land of vision, and see how the battle goes, and where best to strike a blow for freedom and for faith. Can we better do this, than by speaking of the three great movements in the religious world, and marking, as clearly as we may, the tendencies which promise the coming of the Church of Christ — the advent of a spiritual faith, for which we wait with longing desire, and look with strained vision, till our eyes flow in tears.

The theme, to which we pray your audience, is the Church of the Future—the Church of Humanity and God—the Church of Freedom and of Faith. For clear discrimination, let us allude first, to the theology and church of the past — still living, but historically a thing of the past. Secondly, speak of the theology of rationalism, or the naturalism of the positive and sceptical school in religion. And lastly, unfold the outline of the new church, built on the deep things of the spirit, that our faith may not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

The simple faith in Christ and him crucified, which characterized the early disciples, and went, like hallowed fire, from heart to heart, melting every sentiment into sympathy, in the process of time, was cor-

rupted, when Christianity had planted her banners on the imperial walls of Rome, and exchanged a crown of thorns for a regal diadem. Then came the era of councils, creeds, dogmas, and theologies. The pristine, burning consciousness of faith gave way before these attempts of the intellect to state in the form of propositions, what before the heart had felt; and which, without any formula whatever, went forth as an inspiration, with the charmed memory of Jesus, to regenerate the Jew and convert the Roman, while it poured the tide of spiritual life hard by the classic altars of Corinth. Philosophically, these attempts to define Christianity, and form it on the basis of the logical understanding, mark the declension of its spiritual power. If religion had been permitted to remain the thing of the affections, undisturbed by the logical understanding, the Christianity of Paul and John would have been the faith of the world, and pure and undefiled religion the grace of mankind and the charm of childhood. Christianity is life and spirit. It eludes the grasp of system makers. It is a rich mass of unstratified truth, gold-bearing in every part. No. The Church of Christ, without a formula, save the living word, planted itself, by the power of its truth, by the inspiration of God, by the spiritual presence of Jesus in the hearts of men, for one or two centuries, without so much as ever suspecting that its loved truth needed to be wrought out into ar-

ticles, or supported by a creed. But, false philosophy grew up in the church, and religion was made to stand in the wisdom of men—not in the power of God. Spiritual grace departed from the church; the gift of tongues ceased; the word of prophecy failed; the power of healing was lost; and the divine presence of Christ withdrawn when charity was forgotten. Then, when the scholastic intellect of Greece and Alexandria converted Christianity into Platonism, came the fierce dissensions which rent the churches; and finally, the creed ascribed to Augustine, which ever since has passed for Christian verity. The masses, unable to read, trusted the priest, who held them in the chains of authority, forged by superstition and fear. Persecution and poison, the rack and thumbscrew, have done their work; the fires of Geneva and Smithfield have licked the blood of free hearts. The torch and fagot have lighted up the dark canvass of history, and revealed how brave men could dare to be true, and could die rather than believe what was called religion.

Two arguments, never answered, are made against creedal theology. The one, that the early church was planted and prosperous without it. For, the apostles' creed, so called, the simplest and best, was not of apostolic origin. They were satisfied with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The other, that the Gospel is a sufficient guide to salvation. If your creed teaches

more than the Bible, it is false; if less, it is insufficient; if only what the Bible teaches, useless!

In Catholicism, the creed produces stagnation; in Protestantism, sects; in both, spiritual freedom is lost. Nay, not lost; for did a creed ever produce spiritual freedom?

While we look with profound respect and sympathy upon the piety of noble men, nurtured in the old theologies, and love to feel that we share an interest in the high examples of goodness, absent from no church or age, still we see that it was not their beliefs, but their communion with the divine spirit of Christ, that gave their piety the fragrance of heaven.

A glorious brotherhood is that which overleaps all sectarian distinctions, and compels our admiration of Fenelon, Baxter, Luther, and Knox; Wesley, Wayland, and Ware; Jeremy Taylor, and Bossuet; Swedenborg, Channing, and Chalmers;—Catholics, Protestants, and Reformers, as they were.

And the broad and loving spirit of Christ is breaking down these old barriers. The ancient theologies have had their day, and the free high thought of the world asks for something deeper, truer, and more spiritual. Professor Park, Bushnell, and other noble scholars of the orthodox ranks, are examining, modifying, or dissenting from the hard dogmas which once prevailed in New England. The orthodoxy of the latest schools is so near the advanced position of

Unitarian scholarship, that we can reach out our hands over the falling barriers and crumbling partition walls, and bid each other God speed. Dr. Hodge of Princeton, Dr. Dana, and others, of the old school, may protest and utter wailful vaticinations, but the movement of the world is onward still, and the free spirit of the age will not be bound by the iron clasps of the old forms. Evidence comes from this great, but concealed movement to reform the old theology, that our views are right. It is a striking fact that every free investigation of theology turns men's minds in the direction of Unitarian thought. In the bosom of the Episcopal Church in England there is now an interesting awakening of free thought; and we are printing, and spreading far and wide, in defence of our views of the atonement, the writings of clergymen of that church and professors of its universities. In France, free thought speaks, and our doctrines are gathering friends and followers under the able advocacy of Coquerel, a distinguished preacher of Paris. But in the mountains of Transylvania, where the oldest community of Unitarians exists, it is struggling against the autocratic power, to save their universities from being closed. The iron hand of Austrian Catholicism is resting on them now.

We have no bitter words to utter against the old theology. Its errors, as to the character of God, and its blighting theories of human nature, are losing

their hold, year by year, on the common heart. The idea that God, of his mere good pleasure, elected a few to salvation; that Christ died to reconcile the Father, as the Episcopal prayer book says in the thirty-nine articles; that the Divine Nature suffered on the cross to satisfy divine law; or, that the sufferings of innocence are likely to soften the penalties of guilt, by working any change in the divine counsels;—these things are fading out of men's minds. We dismiss the old theologies, with the belief that while they still retain their place at the ordination, and in the council, they bear the marks of decay. They will pass away — by the free movement of the human mind; by the large scholarship of the age; by a higher reverence for the human soul; and by clearer notions of justice and law. This settling away from the creed of our fathers, betrays the secret dissatisfaction which it has created. We can hardly find one who is not now quite willing to restate for himself the dogmas to which he subscribes.

Hence, the true Church of the Future can never be built on these foundations. The roots of old error, fastened in the soil of truth, must have some vitality, even when the branches cease to bud and blossom. But science and free thought are the hand writing on the wall. It has been found wanting. It must die, and give place to the Church of Humanity and of God, of Freedom and of Faith—a church not of the-

ology, but of the Holy Spirit and the deep things of God.

But here we are confronted by another theology—the rationalistic—the anti-supernatural and iconoclastic school of criticism and thought. Will this attempt to settle Christianity on the basis of a positive philosophy, accomplish the end in view, and give us the Church of the Future?

Repelled by the old beliefs, rationalism has sought to place Christianity on a new basis, both by criticism and philosophy. The spiritual element has been ignored—the miraculous eliminated from the Gospel and the life of Christ. The rationalist makes the human understanding the guage of religion. If scientific, what he cannot reduce to a known law, he rejects. He has no domain of faith in the spiritual. He regards the Saviour but a mere man. The Bible hardly rises, in his estimation, to the dignity of genuine history. He insists upon the absolute in religion. Rationalism denies that a miracle was ever wrought, or that Jesus has any other authority than that derived from goodness. It exalts mere logic above the higher reason, and vindicates the understanding at the sacrifice of the divine intuitions. It stands in the wisdom of men, but not in the power of God. True, it is a protest against fanaticism, mysticism, and superstition, but has no vital life of its own down in the roots of human nature. Rationalism is

not a Church—has no inspiration. It does its work, and dies.

Baffled and tried human nature cannot stand in its own strength. It wants to feel the soft pressure of an arm mighty to save and uplift. It needs a basis of faith in the eternal. It wants to trust, not in relentless law, but in the Fatherhood of God. It must believe in the spiritual realities, — yea, the deep things of God. It must have the assurance that God loves and pities us in the temptations and sorrows of our earthly discipline, or the heart would break. Rationalism, which makes law a God, and God a law, can give no comfort in the darker experiences of our tried natures, when deep calleth unto deep! We cannot accept it as a perfect interpretation of God or human nature. It talks of development and law, when the heart cries out in anguish for pardon. The age is waiting and asking for something better and truer. If it were not so, should we see this distrust of the old beliefs; this shrinking from the conclusions of rationalism; this tendency to faith in modern spiritualism, and medium communications; and the great unrest of all sects and churches? These movements of our yearning nature need an interpretation —a prophecy and a fulfilment.

The kingdom of Heaven — the new church, the inspiration of pure hearts, the hope of a true humanity—whence and how shall it come? Slowly or-

ganizing into form, there is coming the Church of the Future, whose advent we may not see, though the sky redden in the east, and the morning star give us sign of the breaking day. It shall not be the church of human speculation, like the old theologies; or of form, like the sacerdotal church of Rome or England; or of human reason alone, like the rationalistic. It shall not be the church of Unitarians, or Trinitarians; of Baptists, or Methodists. But it shall be the Church of God and his Christ, comprehending what is true in each sect, without being sectarian. Have we not all yearned for a Church universal? One that should absorb these little sects, that set themselves up as churches, and make more of their points of difference than their points of agreement? Have we never longed for the unity of the spirit, that the scattered members of Christ might make one harmonious whole? Then, whatever our special church, we are prepared for an argument for the true church, having God for its basis —Christ for its head—truth for its substance —inspiration for its impulse — life for its aim — love for its power — humanity for its object — and the reconciliation of heaven and earth, the great atonement, for its result.

The central idea and element of the Church is the consciousness of God. In three ways the conscious presence of the Infinite Father has been practically denied. The old theology denies it by assuming that

God is an awful Being, sitting on his throne — the dark clouds gathering around the terrible Presence— the thunders pealing — the lightnings flashing forth his indignation and terrific power, in tongues of flame—Mount Sinai, covered with clouds and thick darkness, sending forth awful utterances, the symbol of the dread Jehovah. This idea of God, removes him from the sphere of human affections and sympathies, as much as utter scepticism. We know that Christ, in this theory, is endowed with those tender attributes of which the Father is stripped; Christ being made the object of love, and God the object of fear. But this does not change the fact at all. On the other hand, rationalism ignores the consciousness of God, by denial of his Providence in history, and his presence in the soul. It resolves all things into law, and legislates God out of the activities of the universe he has created. It has no personal God. It leads to Pantheism — God everywhere and nowhere. It is the ultimate of what human thought can do, all for itself alone. This recognition of the indwelling, holy presence of God, in history, in nature, and in us all, is an idea which inspires the scholar, uplifts the soul, comforts the tried, and gives strength to the struggling and the tempted. But not less has it been denied by the world at large. In politics and in business, how little is the idea of God's pure presence really felt! In legislation and in traffic, men drive

hard bargains, and sharp practice is exalted into a virtue, as if there were no God! The daily conduct of life, of this great nation, is a practical avowal of atheism. When our Puritan fathers met and voted "that the earth was the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, and that they were the Lord's people," and therefore had the right to certain lands which the primitive owners were unwilling to give up, they recognized God, even in the very act of robbery; but we employ a method more direct. What we want, we will have — and we take it, nor pause—

"To mutter o'er some text of God."

In affairs of state concern or private advantage, there seems a growing feeling that there is no God. This unconsciousness of his vital presence, is what Paul speaks of as being "without God in the world." But the consciousness of God is the vitality of religion and the life of the soul. It must become the great idea of the church. We have so fallen away from the recognition of God, that he would hardly escape the charge of enthusiasm, who should solemnly affirm the presence and communion of the Holy Spirit vibrating through his own. If, with the simplicity of a childlike faith, we could feel that all nature, and every one of its myriad forces, were but expressions of his love, presence, and power, would it derange the positive methods of science? If we could realize that things do not make themselves, but God is manifest from the inception to the completion

of life; that something of his awful presence, we feel, when the thunders break upon the still air; something of God is seen in the shadows of the solemn mountains, and felt in the deep retreats of the forest primeval, or in the boundless sweep of the chainless sea; that something of his smile lingers upon the flowers at evening, or lights the valley with the purpling blush of morning, and gilds the bow of promise when the storm has passed away. Pure as the breath of morning, there springs the grateful tribute of thankful hearts, that feel that the Father is present now as much as ever he was in Eden.

The world is not abandoned of heaven. If I am to believe God once spoke to men, I believe he speaks still. If Paul was inspired, why may not Pauline faith once more receive Pauline inspiration? "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" We assume that he spoke to men in the past — why not in the present? Though no outward voice, in tempest fire and smoke, reach our ear—or, like solemn music, float through the realms of sense, and no heavenly murmur of the celestial spheres; still, the divine spirit comes to willing hearts, and the benediction of the Father falls upon believing souls.

"In every great unfolding of human nature, people have felt the nearness of God." In this sense Novalis was right in saying, "When I lay my hand on man, I touch God." "In contact," says a deep think-

er, "with every grand era in the experience of mankind, will be found a fresh discovery of the preternatural—a plenary sense of God; the descent of the holy spirit; a day of pentecost to faithful souls, giving them the utterance of a divine persuasion; and dispensing a new gospel over the world." A sense of reverence deepens in our nature, as we think of mysterious space, time, eternity. How much more so, when we become conscious of the Infinite Spirit, who, back of all—rather embosoming all—enfolds the universe as a mother clasps to her bosom the child of her love! But we have no language of God. Human speech expresses only human conceptions and sensibilities. Hence, words are inadequate to adjust the divinity of God to the humanity of man. But heaven responds to human need, and hearts may feel what tongues can never tell. How do we know God is good, but by having the idea of goodness? or just, or loving, or pure, or true, except we have some spiritual correspondence to these ideas? By this anlysis, we see that God reveals himself to human nature, while he still maintains a mysterious silence. But, O, how much nearer, when the heart, baptized with a newness of spiritual life, feels the sweet presence of the divine spirit, and earth becomes transfigured, and the high hour of communion, and the inflowing of the divine life, make the serene, but festal season of the soul's worship, and the heart interprets its own purity, in its visions of God. Let the true church

build itself on this fact of consciousness, so deep and inspiring, if it would once more be clothed in the garments of beauty and righteousness. Let it hallow life, consecrate home, sweeten joys, bless duties, soften griefs, and divine peace shall come with a divine presence. The Redeemer said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come and make our abode with him." This is not an orientalism, but the solemn experience of the spirit. "I can do all things," says Paul, feeling the divine influx, "through Christ strengthening me."

We are told of a ship, building in England, with so deep a keel that it will not be disturbed by the waves. It will run in smooth water, though the surface of the ocean be lashed into foamy billows. So is the soul that rests on the divine consciousness. It embosoms itself in the serene, the tranquil, the eternal. It shall not be disturbed by the surface storms of life, for it rests on God; the everlasting love supports it—buoys it up; it shall never founder or sink in the tempest and the sea!

Men need God. In the hour of peril, scepticism is disarmed and upon its knees. It is a divine instinct—not an education. Lips that never breathed the name of Christ in purity, are vocal then; the soul breaks the enclosures of sin and asserts for itself a refuge in the divine.

This Fatherhood of God is the primal element of

faith in the true church; for it is the subjective and everlasting fact of the relation of the human consciousness with the divine personality. Let doubt talk as it will, of law, and hesitate to believe in eternal Providence, God is present still in human history and experience. He is not an idle spectator in the midst of past creations, but an actor; and if an actor, then there is a Providence to meet the wayward currents of human life. When the Christian consciousness takes vital hold of these facts as the central and most important truth man can know, then shall the new church of faith, and not of theology, have free course and be glorified.

And this faith, as the larger contains the lesser, carries with it the tender hope of spiritual communion with our loved friends, who have passed onward to the great secret. It does not repel the belief that the spiritual world lies unseen, quite within the verge of mortal lines, and that some celestial messages of love may be breathed into human hearts by such as have a watching and a shielding presence, and who love us, as we look into the grave of bereaved affection, and love still. The tenderest sentiments of faith weave in with the purest sensibilities of our better nature, and constrain us to hope and believe. This ancient church is consecrated by the sacred memories of departed generations, whose spirits seem to start around us, and gather here in silent sympathy with the hour.

There seems a holy presence near,
As shadows deepen on the wall,
Of loved ones who once worshipped here,
As memories sweet their forms recall.

Those loved ones seem not far away,
But hallow now this place of prayer,
And, in the falling light of day,
They breathe a blessing on the air.

"Soft echoes from the spirit land,
Seem vocal as we tread these isles;
Are they not here? that holy band,
To greet this day with welcome smiles."

The second great fact of the true church, is the vital reception of Christ, as the expression of God, and the marking an era in the spiritual history of the race. This is something above sectarian limitations. God spoke through him, loved through him, and has given in him, assurance of pardon and peace for the penitent—pledging his mercy, and pouring a fresh tide of spiritual forces into the world. Whatever was necessary to have been done on the divine part, for human regeneration, was done, and Christ, the author of salvation, is the divine Head of the Church. Nothing short of this large conception of the mission of Christ, satisfies the exigency. An infinite goodness, on the one hand, a prodigal humanity, on the other, demand this grand provision of grace. Jesus is the divine reconciler of man with God—touching human nature in its tenderest emotions of gratitude and love. Touching God and man—a me-

diator—he had the sympathies of both. The Church of Christ will have no occasion to discuss the dogmatic doctrines of the atonement, which have filled so large a place in polemic theology; for it will be agreed that all that was necessary, was done on the divine part. If there were ever an obstacle to human redemption, lying beyond human possibility, that obstacle has been removed, and it only remains for us to do our duty, trusting in an all sufficient salvation, which comes from God's free mercy, and is promised through faith in his Son. The meaning, purpose, and result, of the death of Christ, will receive a higher interpretation than that put on it by the old theolgies—that it was "an expression of regard for law, and makes it consistent for God to pardon sin." The condition of pardon, found on every page of holy writ, is repentance; and is that not the most absolute regard for his law which demands repentance for its infraction? Human government may not forgive on professions of penitence, but God is not man, and he who punishes, knows the heart, and exercises the pardoning power, without any such apprehension of its doing a damage, as the old theology implies. "Make it consistent for God to pardon sin!" Can the sufferings of innocence make it consistent to release the guilty without a penalty? O, no! If we cannot depend on God's free mercy, we have none to depend upon at all. Consistent! Was it ever inconsistent for a father to forgive a son, when he came

back to his bosom, worn and weary, with streaming eyes and a sorrowing heart? If it were inconsistent for God to pardon sin before Christ died upon the cross, it has been inconsistent ever since. We shall never believe that God smote that meek lamb of heaven, as did the barbarian in the judgment hall of Pilate, with even one blow of vengeance. The Father of the prodigal has long been waiting to see us, afar off, coming back from the world, to the old homestead of heaven, which lay about us in our childhood. And Christ shall lead the way, being the truth and the light. His memorial death shall finally fulfill its great meaning, and lift up the world's life into the sphere of love and communion, and waiting hearts and watching eyes will look for his spiritual coming, ever as of old. His precious name shall mingle in the earliest prayers of Christian childhood, and shall quiver in the expiring utterance of reverent age. The divine life of his was the indwelling God. The inspiration of the spirit flowed in, and filled his pure nature. This is the interpretation of those words, "I and my father are one." The old declarations of the Trinity will not vex the thought of the true Church of Christ, for, if the very personality of Christ be the personality of God—one and the same—then shall all who worship the Father in sincerity and truth, worship the Son. And the Holy Spirit shall no more receive a numerical appellation, but be, as ever, the influx of the divine in the human consciousness.

The third great idea of the true Church, is the spirituality of worship. It admits of no pretence. Worship must be the profoundest spiritual communion of the finite with the infinite; as simple as it is sincere. What is worship but aspiration? Its highest ideal is the tenderest, purest uplifting of tried and trembling hearts, which have learned to suffer and to trust. The solemn temple, the altar service, and mystic rites, may dazzle the imagination of the ignorant, or satisfy the superstitious. But when God lays his hand on human hearts, they feel the hollowness of outward observance. Jesus came without any form or show, and just as he was, spoke in the temple or by the wayside, with the dust of travel on his garments; and the early disciples followed his great example, shocking the Jews, by their neglect of the staid proprieties of a spirit deserted faith. As Christianity grew weak, by the support it received from its worldly allies — the powerful in the state, and the proud in philosophy — it adopted forms and ceremonies which have no apostolical sanction. The more living the faith, the less its form. The simplicity of the Christian rites of baptism and communion betray the divine wisdom which knew what was in man. When religion raised its mitred head in courts and parliaments, and asserted a place of honor in the temporalities, it was shorn of its spiritual power. But when God spoke to Luther, and Luther spoke to the world, a fresh earnestness, and hence a more sincere

worship, prevailed. For when men grow earnest, and become real, they distrust the externals of worship. A vitalizing faith cannot wait for, or permit itself to be bound by, mere shows, but pours forth its cries to God, all for itself alone; and in the true church it must finally come to this. Sacerdotalism must turn its face into the past, and cast longing glances towards Rome, as at Oxford, or else, with open vision, it must look forth into God's world, and keep step to the movement of the age. It cannot stand still. A vessel may anchor, but the world moves on.

The fourth great element of the church is life. It must be a living church, and feel the throb of a divine life in its heart. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Death is the minor note, the subdued and faintest strain, even in the realms of time, where alone it has power. The grand swell and chorus of the universe—in which nature pours and blends all her melodies, that reach from world to world, from star to star, and culminate around the living throne of the Eternal, in ten thousand million blending harmonies, and roll back through the universe its mighty and everlasting anthem—is Life. Life—the great mystery, comprehending all forces, uses, and being. Life—life from the eternal life. Life—ever renewing its manifestation, unfolding itself, reviving the dead, inspiring form, outreaching time — the centrality of God, and the manifestation of himself in creation. Life is everything; without it, nothing is, or can be.

In the beginning was the Life, and the Life was with God, and the Life was God. In him was life; and the life was the light of men — the inspiration and force of the true and living church. It shall be no conventionality, no mere fixture, or foil, to the pleasures and business of the great world. But, it shall become the expression of the most living realities—the tabernacle of strong and earnest souls—the receptacle of the divine life of Christ, and yet the manifestation of that life. The Church, the Home, and the State, all are great, but the greatest of all is the true church, near whose altars shall gush the waters of everlasting life.

Our fifth argument is, that the broad church of God, is the church of humanity. It is not the church of a sect, seeking uniformity of dogma, but communion in the life of God and the life of man. In the old forms, despite has been cast upon human nature; man has been held to be an enemy of God—as if it were possible for one, believing in God at all, to hate him. The consequence was clear; that if man hated God, God hated man—as if it were possible for God to hate anything he had created. Hence, ascetic religion has always looked upon innocent amusements as impious, and the normal demands of our nature for recreation, as proof of depravity. And the very earth is thought to be writhing under the blasting curse of God, while man endures the consequences of the primal fall. But the Church of the Future

shall render to human nature its due ; shall recognize in its genial and graceful humanities, the law of rest, as well as of action — of recreation and jubilant joy. Human nature, abused and vilified, shall find a church to recognize its sacred genuineness. Though the stamp of God is worn, and the freshness of its mintage soiled by earthly use, yet it is genuine, and no counterfeit, in God's round world. But man has the high capability of sinning—a gift bestowed on nothing less than man. He cannot stand in his own strength of will worship, but must lean on God. He is a sinner, but the divine stamp is upon his brow, and the throb of a regal nature is in his bosom — more divine, as he approaches Christ — more regal, as he kneels in humility at the cross.

Next to the divine nature, is human nature. We overlook petty experiences — we sink the personal in the universal, and recognize the great idea of an ever rising, tempted and struggling, yet glorious humanity, sweeping onward to its great destiny. I see a Providence shaping its ends—directing its forces—unfolding the future as an ideal and a hope. I see this in the glimmerings of its twilight history—in its tendencies, expanding in the march of ages — in its settling new continents, held back in reserve till the stern saxon elements of a brave, law loving manhood, and a progressive faith, consecrated the soil to freedom, and the soul to God. The true church shall own the legitimacy of human nature—that man, though a

prodigal, is not an enemy, or an alien, but a son. The true church shall embrace the entire circle of human activities. Hence, it will consecrate whatever there may be of high art—of painting, or music, or any other creation of genius, or result of science; never opposing, but bringing itself in legitimate sympathy with a free, unfolding humanity. The genius of those who have given voice to nature, and spoken in immortal words, the hopes and griefs, the joys and sorrows of the human heart, shall minister at its altars, and the fragrance of their memories shall perfume its "fretted vaults and long drawn aisles."

Therefore, the Church of the Future shall be progressive. The fatal error of the old theologies has been a persistent antagonism to every new idea. Science has been compelled to recant, and yield up its demonstrations, before a tribunal of priests. Geology, in our day, has been branded with evil names. Walter Scott has been interdicted by a piety which felt moved to write Uncle Tom's Cabin, and wield the weapons it forbade. The church has been losing faith in the living inspiration of heaven, and so is fearful lest some of its old traditions might suffer, if free thought had free course. But the broad church of humanity shall recognize the rights of man, in the fullest investigation of scripture or science. It will not fear for truth, though error have a fair field, and somewhat the vantage. A principle is mightier than an army with banners. Men die —

truth never. Let men die — they are bubbles cast upon the eternal sea of life. But truth shall last, for it lies in the eternities of God. The true church shall not stand apart from the world, like a veiled nun, or a Pharisee, saying, I am holier than thou; but with a throbbing heart, it shall go down to men's business and bosoms, to feel something of sympathy with the stern beat of the world. It shall put its best forces of philanthropy into the work which the true sons of men are doing. It shall pronounce its blessing on the glorious activities of life, and bid the hardy sons of toil, God-speed. It shall have the grace and spiritual power to purify, if not hallow, the place of amusement, and throw its sanctities over the necessary relaxation of labor.

The broad Church of the Future shall express and practice the doctrine of human brotherhood. This is the human side of the church, but correlative with the Fatherhood of God. The Lord's Prayer is a sermon whose deep significance we have not yet realized. "Our Father!" We are all one brotherhood. Strike one key of the organ, and trembling, sympathetic vibrations of every chord shall be felt. So we cannot harm the meanest child of Adam without touching responsive chords throughout the world. We are an organic whole — a brotherhood, however bounded. National limitations and barriers hold not here. Colors all fade out here. Bond or free, black or white, we are one brotherhood, and God, who is

no respecter of persons, is our Father. The laws may determine who is a citizen of the State, and on what conditions; but here is something which lies quite beyond the legal record. The broad church acknowledges a citizen of the commonwealth of God, wherever it sees his image and the superscription of an immortal nature, fettered or free. This principle shall bring to a peaceful end every oppression in the world. It is a mighty truth. It cannot fail in doing its missioned work. God-speed the day! Its results are the highest ideal of human existence on this earth, realized. Long ages may elapse, but it must come. In God's own time, it must come. How can it be otherwise, when all the forces of good look to this end, and nature seems to join in sympathy with the swelling notes of a free humanity?

When the free wild birds that greet the golden sun with gushing melodies of jubilant praise, upon these rock-ribbed hills, teach us to be free—when the free and ancient winds, that breathe upon us from their mountain homes, fill our hearts with the inspirations of freedom, and the roll of the ocean gives swelling volume to the eternal anthem of liberty, that nature chants in her great temple, may we not prophecy the freedom of the race?

The Church of Christ is the Church of the Future—the church of humanity and of freedom. And, finally, the glorious work to be done, is the inspiration and uplifting of humanity from the false and the low. Is this not a grand mission? And you, of this

church, have chosen our brother to help you in this work. Three years since, I stood in this place, to welcome another. The shades of death have fallen on him, and the blossoms of spring start upon his grave.

"Along the chords the fingers strayed,
"But an uncertain warbling made."

He has passed onward—a tried but sincere spirit—to receive the mercy which we all do need. Peace and sweet memories to the voiceless dead! Another honored brother stands in his place to-day. The same Christian hearts are here to welcome him, seeking spiritual guidance; the same great temple of nature surrounds us—her altars crowned with garlands of beauty; the same pure heavens above us; and this ancient church, consecrated half a century ago, by the lightnings of God, still stands, a memorial of other days, and thrice hallowed by the tender memories of the past; by the worship of the fathers who sleep in yonder graveyard; by the faith of their sons; by prayers which have gone up from a thousand hearts that now are still and pulseless as the marble stone that tells their name!

Be it your desire, as it is your duty, to see that your faith stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

O! come, Father all loving; come, blessed Jesus, who didst die upon the cross; come, mighty to save; pour into our souls fresh inspiration and life, that we may go forth to do thy will, and love thy work!

Respects of
W W Willis